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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good morning, as always.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, we have a government that has loudly and proudly claimed that theirs is the most radically transparent government this province has ever seen in its history—in its history. It's not that the Holt government ever engages in ridiculous levels of hyperbole, but I digress. Once again, what the government members claim and what the reality is are two completely different things. We have a trio of RTI requests that were submitted months ago and are now all being delayed until after—wait for it—the end of the session this Friday.

RTI requests are made to get answers to matters important to New Brunswickers, like contracts and how they were reached. From this government, we have seen highly redacted documents that answer very little. Does the Premier really believe that strategically delaying the response to an RTI request until after the adjournment of the Legislature is acceptable? Will she order the relevant departments to release the information, yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I find it very interesting that this member would bring up RTI requests. It's a regular process, and it's well known that there is a time frame in which these have to be done and researched.

I will remind the member of the first RTI response that I got from their government way back when. It was 1 000 pages of black ink—1 000 pages. It made the cover of the *Telegraph-Journal* that year. That's the record that we have worked with. We're working on our RTI request process to make it stronger. The members opposite left us with the worst in Canada. We are going to fix it to make it the best. That's what we're working on right now.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): I'm not done. I'm not done. We're still working on it. The members opposite can make a request. They know the process. They have been here long enough. They'll get their answers.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The government members are the best advertisement for the reason this province needs to be rid of them. They say that they're doing better, but they're not doing anything differently. We've been waiting for months. The RTIs are being delayed. They're not being delivered. They're heavily redacted. So what the minister says and what's actually happening are two completely different things.

We have an RTI request for deals signed in India with OCT Therapies and Quantiphi. There was a request for correspondence, documents, briefs, and materials signed between the government and OCT Therapies & Research and between the government of New Brunswick and Quantiphi. These deals were the cause of much self-congratulation and backslapping in the Holt government. Mind you, these companies already had a connection to New Brunswick, so there was no need for the Premier to go jet-setting to India for an announcement that she could have made right here at home. To the Premier, what is in these files that the most radically transparent Premier in the history of New Brunswick doesn't want people to see while the Legislature is in session? Tell us, Premier—the unredacted version, please.

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Madam Speaker, again, I find it rich that we're making comparisons. The member opposite is attacking the Premier for going on a business trip with the Prime Minister of Canada. I can see why he finds that confusing. There was no way the previous government could have any conversations with the federal government about doing anything for this province. We are moving files forward to bring us to the forefront of this country, to make this province as strong as it can be. The head of the Confederation is just where we should be. For him to attack trips when we are making good progress and good deals is absolutely what we would expect.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): A trip with no results? Yes. We do have a job, and it is to hold this government to account for what it is not delivering, Madam Speaker. We have RTIs that have now been extended to June 25, which I will remind you, once again, is after the adjournment of the Legislature. We asked for any and all communications, records, or documents related to eVisitNB, Foundever Group, or Foundever Assistance Services Corporation.

We can understand why this America-first Premier is hesitant to reveal the inner workings of her capitulation to American interests over New Brunswick interests. Divided loyalties aside, this radically transparent Premier is going to run away from this Legislature without being held to account for the contracts she signed. Will the Premier live up to her own promise of transparency and answer these RTI requests before the House rises for the summer? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to thank the member opposite for talking about RTIs, the work that this government is doing, and the progress that we've already illustrated in previous answers. I just want to jump back to comments the interim leader made with respect to working on the economy and working on economic development. As the Minister responsible for Economic Development, I want to say that killing the economy is not a measure of success. The approach the previous government took was to ignore economic development and to say no, we don't want to actually move this province forward. In October 2024, that period ended, Madam Speaker. In this session, we actually announced a new plan for the province, a new economic development plan that will deliver services that New Brunswickers need, like health care and education. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, there's an F for that answer, Madam Speaker. The Holt government continues to try to spin a narrative that the New Brunswick economy is doing well. We have regularly seen these government members try to spin, deflect, blame, and do anything necessary to avoid taking responsibility for their track record on anything.

In this case in particular, it's the Holt government's poor performance on the economy, with various strategies that have done nothing to address our province's economic issues now. New Brunswick has the second-worst jobless rate in the country. The province's economy continues to show zero growth year over year, and 2 200 full-time jobs were lost during that period. This should come as no surprise because the Premier created zero jobs when she was head of the Jobs Board. Who will the Premier blame for her dismal performance with respect to the jobless rate in this province and the stagnant economy over the past year? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): You know, Madam Speaker, I again want to thank the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about our new economic development plan. I also want to remind the members opposite about their six years of ad hoc economic development planning. There was no plan. Back then, they went from one file to the next. They had files that they knew they needed to act on, but rather than acting on those files, they hoped for a rejig.

Throughout this session, I've been listening to the opposition attack us for investing in New Brunswickers, attack capacity for dairy farmers in this province, and give us solutions that would lead to us sending all of our raw milk product to Nova Scotia, Quebec, or Ontario. We

already have a \$50-million litre-capacity challenge in terms of processing. We delivered a solution that actually provides the ability to handle that capacity and grow; yet, for six years, we were left with no plan. We are now working toward delivering for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): There were 60 jobs lost in Sussex, Madam Speaker.

The Holt government has recently committed to yet another aspirational target of 2.5% growth in GDP each year over the next four years or 10% growth overall in the economy by 2030, once again committing to something that is outside of this mandate. However, hey, what are details to this government? Everything is about what the government members are going to do. They want New Brunswickers to forget that, in the past year, the province's economy has shown no growth. Further, they expect that New Brunswick will hit an average growth rate that it has never hit in its history. The Premier believes that her continued use of jargon and buzzwords will magically transport our economy to heights we have never seen before. What we are seeing are massive record-breaking deficits, credit downgrades from stable to negative, slower growth, and cooling private sector investment. I can't wait to hear the Premier use her favourite talking points about how she's going to pull off this miracle. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for, again, the opportunity to rise to talk about economic development. I believe that we have a very achievable goal of 10% economic growth by 2030. The challenge we find ourselves in is with trade. We inherited an economy in which the target was 0% economic growth. There was no plan. Madam Speaker, it has taken us a very short period of time to build a framework to rebuild an economy in the face of ever-changing tariffs and ever-changing economic conditions.

I've been touring this province and seeing resilience. I think the opposition members need to remind themselves that we are the most export-dependent jurisdiction in Canada. Those exports are predominantly delivered to the United States. When I look at what New Brunswick businesses have delivered in this province, I'm proud of how the numbers hold up. Do you know what really impacts us? It's when the members opposite vote no on measures like the small business investor tax credit (SBITC).

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Maybe the Premier should get her nose out of her phone and have the guts to get up and defend her own record. Since day one, this Premier has attempted to blame or deflect whenever possible. She has blamed Trump for his tariffs. While tariffs have had an impact, they have not made the sky fall, as the Premier tried to make everyone believe was going to happen. She tooted her own horn on the dropping of interprovincial trade barriers, yet many still exist, and

there is no quantifiable benefit. Thus far, this government has talked about GDP growth but has attacked one of the biggest drivers of GDP in our province by cutting the provincial vet lab and services to farmers.

The Premier recently said that the government must deliver certainty. The only certainty this government will deliver on is broken promises, rising debts and deficits, and the loss of private investment. The facts of the past year will predict what we see from this government for the next two years. Premier, if you don't reach these targets, who will you blame? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): First, let it be known that we have an economic plan for the entire province. Thank you for asking the question. Behind me are members representing the entire province of New Brunswick. So the plan is for everyone.

It mustn't be forgotten that the members opposite were in office for six years. In that time, they received billions of dollars from the federal government. The last amount recorded was \$4.3 billion per year. This money was supposed to be allocated to health care, infrastructure, and schools. What did the former government do? It just used the money to pay down on the debt. It let things fall apart. We will do as we usually do; we will clean up your mess. In the meantime, take notes, learn, and thank us once we've succeeded. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

NATURAL GAS

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The people of New Brunswick have been watching the Premier dance to Mark Carney's lead for the past 15 months. Lately, the dance has been about AI and data centres. Carney promotes AI, and then so does the Premier by putting it into kindergarten classes.

However, there is one area where the Premier has remained a wallflower. I speak, of course, of natural gas development in New Brunswick. It appears that might be about to change. We've been getting plenty of reports of a public opinion survey being conducted about natural gas development in New Brunswick. Can the Premier tell this House and the people of New Brunswick whether her government is behind the public opinion survey on natural gas development?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I can answer your question: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Yesterday's edition of *Acadie Nouvelle* included an article titled *Natural Gas: Dominic LeBlanc is encouraging N.B. to lift the moratorium*. [Translation] The federal minister is also echoing the words of the federal Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, who opposed the idea of building a natural gas pipeline in a province that is estimated to have over 80 billion cubic feet of natural gas reserves.

The Prime Minister and two of his most influential ministers are now urging the Premier to lift the moratorium. At the same time, our Premier and our government are creating a real financial disaster and aren't proposing any clear solutions to get out of it. Can the Premier tell the House if the Prime Minister has made natural gas development a condition of any financial assistance?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very heartened by the focus that this government has on growth. When it comes to driving the economy, there are two aspects: There is attraction, and there is retention. Under the leadership of this Premier, our forestry sector is the lone jurisdiction that has not had significant curtailments or closures, especially in the lumber sector. It is the economic driver in this province.

New Brunswickers understand that we need to be able to do things differently. We need to be able to unlock the potential of our natural resources. That's why, under this Premier, we brought forth a comprehensive mineral strategy and a new mining Act. We'd like to have the members' support with respect to Bill 45.

The Leader of the Opposition pointed out that all we do is talk about what we will to do. One of the things that we will do is have a mining announcement in a number of weeks. Thank you.

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Well, the biggest natural resource in this province is natural gas. I don't understand why we are not unlocking the cherry on the cake. Anyway, we'll see how that goes.

With all the travelling the Premier has done as part of Mark Carney's entourage, it seems likely that he has made at least a little time for her to plead her case for some sort of help with the financial mess that she has made through extreme overspending and an extreme inability to simply budget. Can the Premier tell this House what conversations she has personally had with the Prime Minister, specifically surrounding the development of natural gas reserves and the Liberal moratorium on natural resource development?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to have the opportunity to talk about the relationship that our government has built with the federal government and with the Prime Minister, such that the Sisson mine has been named a project of national interest. We have a partnership with the feds to see that project advance supply chain opportunities for New Brunswick businesses and provide well-paying jobs for New Brunswickers.

From the conversations I've had with the Prime Minister, I know we have a federal government that is also keen to support investment in our critical infrastructure like Port Saint John and the Port of Belledune and to make major investments in this province in terms of defence to the tune of billions of dollars. We are working very hard to build a productive relationship with the federal government and make sure that New Brunswick gets more than its fair share of the federal government's support and investment. Our team works very hard to build those good relationships and to have conversations about our resources and about our position as a regional energy leader. We will continue to work with the federal government to make sure that New Brunswickers get the—

[Translation]

TIMBER ALLOCATION

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

The logging activities of forestry corporations licensed to cut timber on Crown land are regulated by a five-year management plan approved by the government. J.D. Irving's current five-year plan expires this year, and it has been pushing for major changes that would take effect next year. We know that JDI has lobbied hard to increase the amount of timber that it is allowed to cut.

It included that pitch in its current forest management plan, putting the government on notice that it would be looking to increase the amount of timber that it is allowed to cut by 34%.

I've heard that the Minister of Natural Resources has agreed to significantly increase JDI's annual allowable cut. Madam Speaker, how much of an increase has the minister agreed to? Is it 34% or 45%? What's the number?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the honourable member for his question. With respect to that question, today, I'd like to speak about the report of the national task force on forestry, which was just released by the federal government. There were conversations within that task force that looked at the world's leading jurisdictions with respect to sustainable forest

management. The report points out that you do not have to go to Finland to look for the jurisdiction that really has its act together with sustainable forest management practices that balance recreation and conservation with ensuring a vibrant working forest. That very document singled out New Brunswick as a star in this country with respect to forestry management. That's why we're attracting investment in the forestry sector. That's why Interfor is investing in New Brunswick. We have Groupe Lebel investing in New Brunswick. These are in addition to vibrant companies such as—

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, the ecological degradation of Crown forests and the assault on the private wood market for woodlot owners that was launched by the Alward government in 2014 and continued by both the Gallant and Higgs governments have to stop. In 2014, the Alward government handed Irving a 25% increase to its annual allowable cut. This minister is going to jack it up again. The last time it happened, it took the stuffing out of the market for woodlot owners. It led to widespread deregulation with respect to biodiversity, conservation, habitat protection, and monitoring forestry practices on Crown land. Private wood producers are being forced from their livelihoods. Wildlife populations are in decline for lack of sufficient suitable habitat. The Crown lands have flipped from acting as a carbon sink to being a big source of carbon emissions. Why is this minister prepared to make this situation even worse?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, it's because of our forestry practices that we're going to make this situation better. If we have any kind of increase in the timber harvest, the reason is that we have a growing wood supply. Year over year, New Brunswick is actually adding to our wood supply. That provides more capacity so we can actually have growth.

With respect to conservation management of our forest, depending on what you count, Madam Speaker, almost 30% of Crown land is protected to various degrees. New Brunswick is a leader in that space. Also, we're going to add to the effectively conserved land in New Brunswick, increasing it from 10.1% to approximately 15% over our mandate. We're making it better. We're not making it worse, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, Irving's current forest management plan includes recommendations for what it wants the Minister of Natural Resources to include in next year's plan. Those requests include a proposal to increase the area of naturally regenerating forests to be replaced by tree plantations every year by a whopping 33%. If agreed to, this will significantly increase the spraying of glyphosate on Crown lands to levels never seen before in this province.

Imagine you're a hardwood sapling trying to heal the scar left by clear-cutting. Your life will be a short one. The same thing could be said for wildlife feasting on recently sprayed boughs and berries. Can the minister confirm whether Irving's new forest management plan will significantly increase the amount of glyphosate spraying on their licence?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, there is more than just one forestry company in this province. I don't think it's helpful for us to pick on one company over the others. Our forestry regime is for all licensees in that regard.

I would like to point out that we harvest approximately 1.7% of the forest each year. Half of that harvest is clear-cut, and half of it is prescription cut. We only plant where we actually... We only plant 0.4% of the forest year over year, so it's not accurate to suggest that we are only clear-cutting areas and planting. It's because we actually want a diverse forest, Madam Speaker. We want hardwood and softwood. We have markets for all of it. We actually need to have that diversity in our forests. Thank you.

VIRTUAL CARE

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are a few weeks away from the full launch of the Holt government's Foundever boondoggle. New Brunswickers have reached out by the thousands to oppose cancelling eVisitNB and sending their e-health to America. However, their concerns have fallen on closed minds. Foundever, with its connections to Mark Carney's Brookfield and the Frank McKenna legacy, is nearly bankrupt. Its credit rating has been slashed to CCC, and the contract it offered nurses pays far less than eVisitNB.

Despite all of this, Premier Holt is one hundred percent on board with the change. It was in all the papers on February 16. However, what is yet to be in the papers is whether the Premier knew that Foundever was slashing nurses' pay when she gave it her enthusiastic blessing. So far, she has refused to get up and acknowledge, much less answer, these questions, so I will try again: Did the Premier know about this?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I'm so thrilled to be given an opportunity to talk again today. I was worried that I wouldn't be asked. We are moving toward June 30 quite aggressively. We speak with the New Brunswick virtual care team, and we are pleased to say that some things are worth sharing. For example, when you want virtual care in New Brunswick, come June 30, you'll be able to dial 811. You will be able to access e-visits through different platforms and search engines. You'll be able to call 1 800 numbers. You'll be able to go to websites that are being promoted through Google search engines. You will not necessarily always speak with a nurse practitioner. Sometimes, you will be directed to a pharmacist to renew your prescriptions. Sometimes, you will be directed to a family doctor. Sometimes, you'll be directed to the emergency department.

This new platform will have a level of discrimination that will give New Brunswickers the best care they've ever had. I'm very proud to have been given this opportunity.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I could see the look of wonder on the faces of government members as they listened to that answer about virtual care going through AI. Google it.

I'll ask the Premier again to get up and tell the House whether she knew on February 16 that she was jamming New Brunswick nurses with her Foundever deal. However, like the saying goes: Better to remain quiet and let people think you're uninformed and unaware than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

On February 16, New Brunswickers learned that their pleas that the Premier come to her senses on this huge Foundever mistake were all for nought. This fall, they can get their kindergarten kids to ask AI to make sense of it. The government is cancelling a service that was usually successful and run by a New Brunswick company that hired local nurses and paid them well and is changing to an American company on the brink of collapse while paying it more and letting it pay New Brunswickers less. When did the Premier know about nurses' pay?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, you know, there are different ways of accessing virtual care. You need to know. I was challenged by an article in the paper this morning with answering: When was the last time I participated as a physician in virtual care? How about twice during this past weekend?

I know the value of different forms of virtual care. If you are a senior and you have access difficulties and don't go online, you can call 811 and be put in touch with the right virtual care provider. If you're a busy mom who is at home managing kids and a family, you can't wait on the line for an hour like you're calling Air Canada. You can book an appointment and get a person who not only will be aware of your concerns, when you were last seen, and what prescriptions you receive but also will help you. Then, within 20 minutes of that call, they will go back into the system, chart a note that the next provider can see, and call in the prescription or order the blood work. This is a much-improved system. I hope for another question so I can share more details. Thank you.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure whether the Minister of Health is the Premier today. Maybe that's his aspiration. I don't know.

I understand that the media has been summoned to make an announcement about virtual health care. I suspect this will involve the Health Minister trying to apply another thick coat of medical-grade lipstick to the Foundever pig. Will the announcement be about a roll out of the new and deteriorating process?

Will it be to tell New Brunswickers that they will no longer have live personal service but will instead be told to call a toll-free number, leave a message, and hope that someone

might call back? It's anyone's guess, just as it's anyone's guess whether the Premier knew she was deliberately setting up nurses for a pay cut. I know what my guess would be.

In fairness to the Premier, here's one last chance. When did she know that nurses' pay was being cut?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you to the member opposite. This government gave out the best nursing salaries ever. Did we forget that? Yes, you can call a number, and you will get called back at an appointed time so that you don't need to spend your day on a telephone line. You will talk to a nurse practitioner if you need to. You will talk to a pharmacist if you need to. You will be diverted to an emergency department if you need to be. There are many options in this new system.

I think this is what New Brunswickers want. They don't want a number where you are sharing text messages with virtual care providers A, B, and C. This company will hire nurse practitioners who will dedicate time to this resource and entity. I think that is predictable. It's what New Brunswickers want. By this coming year, they will wonder how we ever lived without it. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Madam Speaker, I will continue with my questions from yesterday about the mental health and addiction advocate. I am going to ask a follow-up question.

I appreciate that the minister came forward and said that we will have one sometime in the future. I appreciate the minister's answer that the government will move forward with a mental health and addiction advocate. However, what matters are the details. New Brunswickers need to know that the person in this role will be truly independent and able to speak openly on behalf of patients and families. At a time when we are seeing repeated overdoses in communities such as Moncton and seeing growing pressures on services, that independence is critical. People want to know that concerns can be raised without barriers and that real accountability will follow.

Madam Speaker, can the minister explain how this advocate position will be structured, what its scope will be, and how the government will ensure that the advocate operates independently from the system that they are meant to oversee? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate the focus that the member opposite consistently has on mental health. It's clearly something that he is passionate about.

Our government agrees that we need to have better mental health services for New Brunswickers, which was included in the motion to put a mental health advocate in place, which we, as an opposition, passed with unanimous consent. Through that work, we've been engaging with our legislative officers about the best place to put that position in order to deliver the independence that the member opposite asks for. We've also been engaging with the community and the people for whom this position is being created. These people include parents who have had to experience things that no person should have to experience and the partner and stakeholder organizations that have weighed in with feedback on an original proposal to help us modify it and make sure we have the best possible structure that will deliver the accountability that New Brunswickers want.

Our government cares for New Brunswickers and their mental health. That's why we are advancing solutions like virtual care. We are integrating—

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period has expired.